

Passion is a Job Requirement: Affective Labour in Postindustrial Society

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Scrolling through a list of job advertisements on the internet, I pause when one catches my eye. Instead of a job title, like most other listings, it proclaims: “Passion is a Fashion!! Are you a clash fan looking for a job? [sic]”. Although after weeks of searching for work I am feeling rather fed up and cynical, I think “well... hey, I *am* a Clash fan and I *am* looking for work” and click the link. The job turns out to be nothing to do with the punk band *The Clash*, but a street fundraising role asking

This kind of flexibilisation and desecuritisation of the workforce is a key component of neoliberal post-industrial capitalism (Harvey, 2005).

Importantly, post-industrialism also comprises a shift toward a capitalist regime which locates value in “immaterial labour”, or labour that does not produce tangible commodities, rather than in the material labour involved in producing the commodity itself. Lazzarato



Passion is a Fashion!! Are you a clash fan looking for a job?

Street Fundraising could be the perfect role for you! We are looking for creative, fun loving fundraisers who have the ability to inspire people. This job is a million miles away from the...

Leeds

people on the high street for charitable donations. More importantly, the advertisement is loaded with assumptions and meanings that are symptomatic of contemporary global capitalism.

It is representative of a significant change in the nature and composition of work in late capitalism, captured in the concepts of “Post-Industrialism” and the “Post-Fordist” production model. Key to these concepts is that late capitalism has demonstrated a tendency toward more flexible and decentralised modes of capital accumulation, with more complex global chains of production, and more flexible and less secure wage labour (Harvey, 1990; Kumar, 1995). Street fundraising, for example, is one of the most insecure forms of work in the UK: employee turnover is extremely high, and most paid workers operate under the threat of dismissal if they fail to meet donor targets (Fletcher, 2008).

defines immaterial labour as “the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity” (Lazzarato, 1996: 133). Immaterial labour can take the form of technological research, marketing, and the range of services involved in deploying a commodity on the market and maintaining its desirability (ibid). Work in the more developed world can increasingly be described as immaterial, as labour that produces an “immaterial” commodity, such as a service (a commodity consumed in the act of its production), becomes increasingly central (Hardt, 1999). For example, the UK services sector comprises 77% of GDP output (ONS, 2013), and even in China, seen as an industrial powerhouse, the services sector in 2011 overtook manufacturing as the largest employer, contributing 45% of GDP (Reuters, 2013), indicating that it is a global trend. It is important to note, however, that the majority of workers in this sector are usually not the

valorised producers of the cultural content of commodities (such as advertisers and technologists) but constitute a broad array of diverse functions occupied by low-paid and low-skilled workers, such as in retail, transportation, customer services, hospitality, and clerical work.

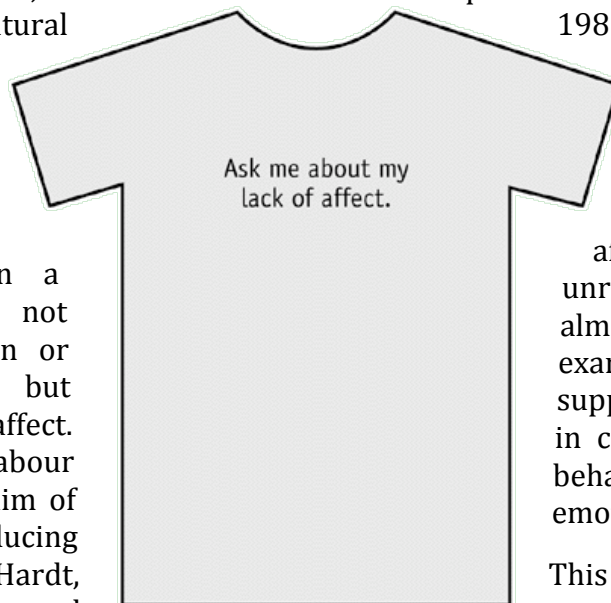
Some theorists have seen the predominance of these forms of work, and particularly their interrelation with information and communication technologies, as heralding a new form of social life in the “knowledge economy” or the “information society” (Webster, 2006). Such a society is characterised by a greater reliance on knowledge and information in work than on physical labour or material resources (Powell and Snellman, 2004). The major productive forces of post-Fordism are seen as abstract intelligences and semiotic forms (Virno, 2004). However, these types of theories elide both the global division of labour, wherein industrial and agricultural production are outsourced to the global South, as well as the real nature of “service” based forms of work.

The majority of work in a “service” economy is not governed by the production or utilisation of knowledge, but rather by techniques of affect. “Affective labour” refers to labour that is conducted with the aim of “affecting” others by producing emotional experiences (Hardt, 1999). Whilst knowledge and communication technologies do form a substantial part of post-industrial work, the most significant form of immaterial “service” labour is in the realm of human interaction (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Many industries (for example, entertainment and hospitality) rely on the creation and manipulation of affects (ibid).

Street fundraising work almost entirely consists of affective labour, as workers must deploy a range of face-to-face communicative techniques to elicit the desired emotional responses of sympathy and the motivation to

donate to charity from passers-by. This is frequently a difficult task – a quick internet search for the term “charity mugger” reveals the extent to which such workers are reviled, and the amount of hostility and abuse they are expected to surmount.

The notion of affective labour is closely related to Hochschild’s concept of emotional labour, which involves the regulation of physical bodies and emotional expression and “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (1983: 7). Hardt (1999) identifies affect as a particularly feminised mode of labour, and acknowledges the genesis of the concept in feminist theories of “care work”, or “labour in the bodily mode” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 293). Crucially, these forms of labour, which are usually expected of women, are naturalised as personality traits and essentialised as expressions of gender (Hochschild, 1983) – which in turn masks



the physical and emotional difficulty of their performance and leads to their devaluation. Furthermore, affective labour is often an unrecognised aspect of work in almost all workplaces – for example, in emotionally supporting colleagues, or even in conforming to standards of behaviour, sociality, and emotional resilience.

This centrality of affective or emotional labour to contemporary forms of work is perhaps best expressed in the advertisement above, where “passion” is identified as a job requirement. The advertisement does not indicate what one must have a passion *for*, but there is nevertheless an expectation that one must be passionate, in an indefinite sense that hints at the contemporary expectation for workers to be emotionally invested in their work – the “passion” thus sought is ultimately predicated on a subjective identification with the company.

These developments suggest an intensification of the Italian *operaist* critique that what characterises capitalism is not only exploitation but the reduction of all life to work (Virno, 2004). The trend of capitalist development is thus the transformation of all human social relations into commodity relations (Negri, 2003), which constitutes the “real subsumption of society under capital” wherein “society is ever more completely fashioned by capital” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 386/255).

Hardt and Negri situate this subsumption into capital in Michel Foucault’s notion of the contemporary shift from a “disciplinary society” to a “society of control” (2000: 22-23). Disciplinary society structures the parameters of thought and behaviour through disciplinary institutions (such as prisons, schools, or factories), whilst in the “society of control”, “mechanisms of command become ever more “democratic”, ever more immanent to the social field, distributed throughout the brains and bodies of the citizens” (ibid, p. 23). In contemporary society, power is diffuse and operates in flexible networks outside of formal institutions of discipline, but still regulates our daily lives (Foucault, 1984).

In the “society of control”, power regulates social life within and through individuals – power achieves domination when “every individual embraces and reactivates [it] of his or her own accord” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 24). Foucault thus understands power as a control that functions simultaneously at the level of the individual and at the level of the entire social body (Foucault, 1984).

Control over street fundraising workers is therefore achieved through a social regime of power that regulates appropriate physical and emotional expression, and which workers adopt and perform as their own. For Hardt and

Negri (2000), power itself is affective, and affective labour is both subject to control and a means by which it is exerted. Affective labour requires the physical embodiment of a given constitution of capital (such as a business) by the worker, who as an individual is both capital’s instrument and subject of domination.

However, although affective labourers such as street fundraisers are subject to a diffuse social regime of power in terms of the parameters of the performance of affect, they are nevertheless still subject to institutionalised disciplinary forms of power that materially govern its exercise. Workers can be fired for failing to meet targets, or merely for failing to mobilise the array of affect, performances, and “passion” to their supervisors’ satisfaction.

Thus power remains the purview of capital in the post-industrial mode of production: for Foucault, “it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection” (1984: 173).



Broadly, the concepts discussed here are aspects of a “postmodern” condition that characterises everyday life in the contemporary world. For Harvey (1990), the postmodern entails a compression of space and time as information technologies converge with a neoliberal economic model to simultaneously expand the reach of the capitalist market and increase the frequency and flexibility of market transactions, including those of labour. This compression has resulted in a “profound shift in the “structure of feeling”” in contemporary social life (ibid: 9). Nowhere is this shift more keenly felt than in the affective labour of post-industrial forms of work, particularly those which entail the subsumption of one’s human emotional and relational subjectivity into a commodity relationship.

And so for these reasons, I did not apply.

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Image 1:

<http://www.gumtree.com/jobs/leeds>

Image 2:

http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-OUasf9I_p98/UgjyZbO4kKI/AAAAAAAAAvE/Z5-x2Dq-pak/s1600/LackOfAffect.gif

Image 3:

http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/02488/chugger-2302_2488152c.jpg